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SOME PERSPECTIVES ON CONFLICT: A Selected Bibliography

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A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

by

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INTRODUCTION

Many planners seem to operate under the assumption that static communities exist or that it is possible to achieve ideal end states which are in equilibrium. They are often shocked to learn that there is substantial conflict involved in what appear to be rational, straight-forward planning proposals. As more planners have begun to work closely with neighborhood groups, and as the profession as a whole has moved from a strictly physical to a more social orientation, there is a need to understand the community in terms of its social as well as physical dynamics rather than end states. Conflict, which is pervasive, both in its individual and its social dimensions, is central to an understanding of the social dynamics of the communities that planners are called upon to help direct and shape.

The bibliography that follows includes a substantial portion of the literature that attempts to explicate the phenomenon of conflict. Attempting to develop a typology that will lend itself to a synthesis of the information available in the area of "conflict-related" literature is seemingly an almost impossible task. Attempts at synthesis have been as cumbersome and, at times, as disjointed

as the literature itself. The approach used in this bibliography will at least provide an initial framework for reviewing the literature.

There are three main sections to the bibliography. Section I includes a listing of general reference sources dealing with the concept of conflict and the major theories of social and individual conflict. Section II is organized into a typology which can be used to explore different basic viewpoints on the subject ranging from the individual to the intergroup perspective. Section III categorizes the literature according to several dynamic and systemic perspectives which can help place conflict into decision-making contexts (e.g., the organization, the polity, the community). These dynamic perspectives can hopefully be used to begin to tie the basic viewpoints in Section II together.

The bibliography that follows does not include areas of study that have attracted a great deal of attention in the literature related to conflict. Two such areas are international conflict situations and game theory. The reasons for these exclusions are 1) our interest and emphasis on community-based conflict (conflict most relevant to the planner), and 2) the need for much more time to adequately comprehend the research related to these areas---especially game theory---and assess its relevance to the community planning context.

A brief final note for those just beginning their review of the conflict literature. The articles on conflict included in Volume 3 of the INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SOCIAL SCIENCES provide an excellent introduction. In addition, collections of readings edited by de Reuck and Knight; McNeil; Stagner; and Swingle are recommended. Citations for these works appear in Section I below.

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II. BASIC VIEWPOINTS ON CONFLICT

A. INDIVIDUAL CONFLICT

Psychologists have been most concerned with conflict as it exists within the individual. To state the issue of individual conflict very simply, a person is considered to be in a state of conflict when, 1) he or she must make a choice between two or more mutually exclusive things, or 2) he or she recognizes that there are differing perceptions of goals, roles, expectations, situations, etc. impinging on him or her.

The first type of individual conflict is represented by theories of cognitive dissonance and cognitive balance (subsection one) and by models of intrapersonal conflict---Levin's Field Theory, Miller's Approach-Avoidance Theory,

March and Simon's analysis of individual conflict, and Brown's Basic Conflict Paradigm (subsection two.)

The second type of individual conflict---that arising from differing perceptions---is covered in subsections three through five. Section three includes the literature dealing with role conflict, while subsections four and five illustrate various types of interpersonal conflict---intragroup interpersonal conflicts (subsection four) and individual vs. the group conflict (subsection five).

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B. INTERGROUP AND CLASS CONFLICT (SOCIAL CONFLICT)

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Most of the proponents of social conflict argue that conflict serves a number of functions in social and group life. They do not deny that conflict may be destructive in some settings but feel that a functional view of conflict is needed to counteract those who perceive it as dysfunctional. The writings of Lewis Coser listed in this section are fundamental in this regard, as are those of Ralf Dahrendorf.

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III. THEORETICAL, SITUATIONAL AND SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVES ON CONFLICT

A. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Conflict theorists (e.g., Coser and Dahrendorf) deride the lack of interest in conflict as a means for explaining how society operates and how change occurs. They place much of the blame on the structural functionalists led by Parsons, Merton, et al. This theoretical bifurcation underlays much of the literature included in this section, yet synthesis may be possible, since in a real sense, both groups are interested in maintaining society although both

recognize the existence of and the need for change. Their differences can be stated thusly: the conflict theorists believe that conflict functions to maintain the society; the structural functionalists believe that structure functions to maintain society.

The literature listed in this section examines both of these points of view as well as providing arguments for synthesis.

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B. SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

It has been argued that personality and situation are the two main influences on cooperation-conflict behavior. Earlier sections of this bibliography dealt with these personality elements. The three subsections in this section of the bibliography illustrate the situational perspective.

Subsection one considers the political/governmental perspective on conflict. One view of politics asserts that government serves two principle functions: 1) a service function---supplying goods and services that cannot be supplied in the private sector; and 2) a political function which is the management of conflict in matters of public importance. Both functions operate simultaneously and are often indistinguishable. This political function is often derided, but others argue that without conflict, without struggle, progress is not possible.

Much of the interest in conflict in the organizational setting centers around its management, to the extent that it appears that conflict is considered dysfunctional. In spite of this strong interest in managing conflict, there are inherent elements in most organizations which create the milieu for both intergroup (intraorganizational), and interorganizational conflict. Other authors see conflict in organizational settings as valuable feedback mechanisms for management. These conflicting views within the organizational perspective are represented in subsection two.

The community perspective on conflict is most difficult one to sort out. In all probability, the community or settlement is the focus for all the types of conflict previously covered. This third subsection includes the literature related to community/urban conflict, and deals with questions of power relationships within the community.

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and on the tension in the system that is normal and should be kept at an optimum level for the system to be viable.

This section deals with conflict in the context of open adaptive systems. The literature included in this section attempts to explicate such concepts as decision-making, equilibrium and change as open systems experience conflict and adapt to maintain viability.

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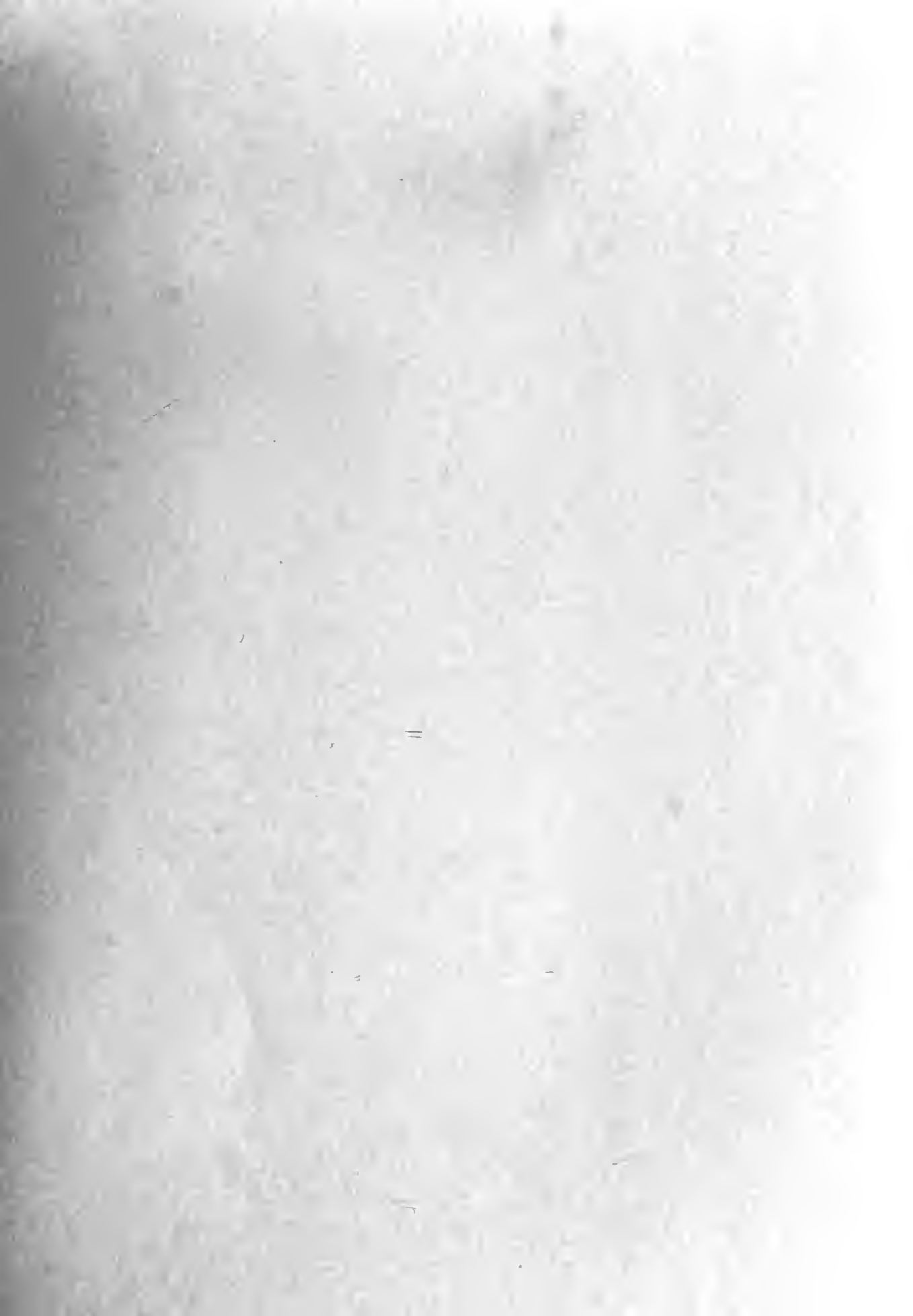
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